

My Experiences in the Service in World War II
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Lehi, Utah

I was born in Los Angeles on March 23, 1924, and reared in Glendale and Burbank. I graduated from high school in February 1943. I certainly remember hearing about Pearl Harbor. I was at a rodeo in Sun Valley, California, that Sunday. I was riding with some men who were in the Reserves or something, and they felt bad they would have to be going into the service. My brother was in the Eighth Armored Division, and though he hadn't yet gone overseas, my family were all worried about me being in the army. I had only the one brother, no sisters (though another boy had died as a baby).

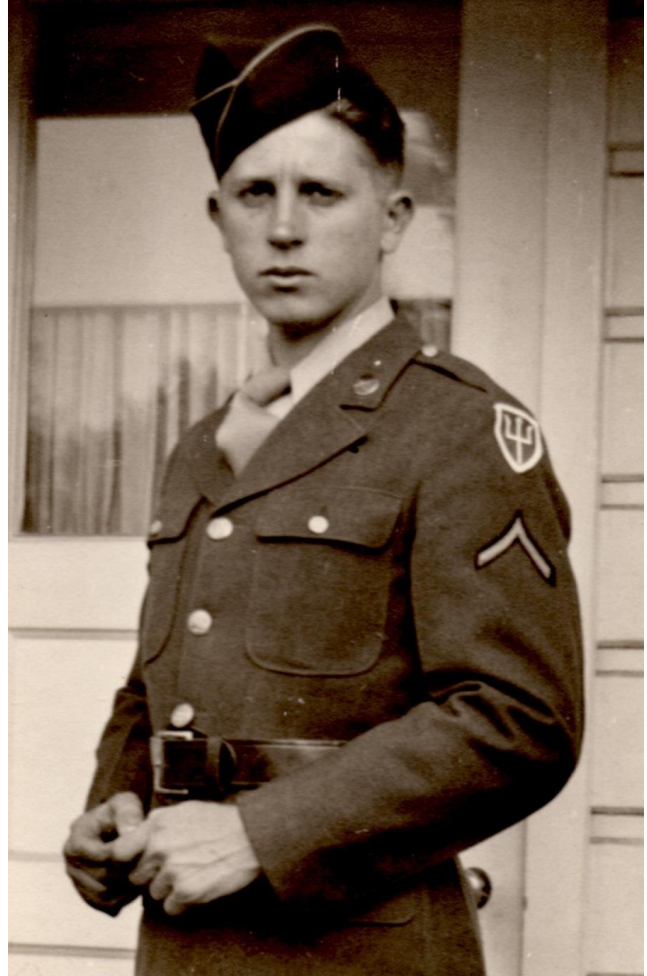
My father, Henry R. Lelegren, was a sign painter at Lockheed Aircraft, where my cousin, Louis Wuhlfkueheler, was the head secretary. We lived right near Lockheed Aircraft.

I was drafted about two weeks after graduating from high school and was immediately sent to the 97th Infantry Division, which was being reorganized from World War I at Camp Swift, Texas. I didn't enlist in another branch of the service because I didn't think I would enjoy the military. I grew up with a very happy childhood, being raised mainly at a summer resort in San Fernando, California, where we enjoyed lakes, duck hunting, fishing, and swimming all summer long—and lots of pretty girls. So I just waited till I was drafted.

My parents worried to death about their boys in the army, because that was all they had to live for. They didn't have any religion or anything like that—my mother was a Catholic, my father a Protestant. They got along fine, but during the war, they just stayed home and worried. My brother and I were all-important to them.

I have a letter from my brother, who was trying to comfort me. I had written to him complaining about basic training, especially how some men received serious injuries. As I recall, a few of the soldiers in my regiment committed suicide, and a lot of them were feigning illness, trying to get out of the army. I was with a lot of Italians and Poles from the Northeast. One Italian, when we were out bivouacking in the field, put his foot on a stump, took an ax from the side of a jeep, and asked me to chop the end of his foot off, so he could get out of the army. I took hold of the ax, realizing that I should never do anything like that, so I didn't do it. Most of the men hated the army.

I was also surprised that the army didn't want soldiers who wet their beds. Some of the men were actually bed-wetters, or some of them may have faked it in order to get out. At night, the army would move cots out between the barracks, so the bed-wetters would sleep outside. I presume that many of



these men did get out of the army. On the other hand, many soldiers were really not physically capable of going through the obstacle courses. They would fall and injure themselves, but the army would still make everybody put every effort into doing the course. They insisted we do whatever they wanted us to do, to build up our bodies. I found in one of my letters to my brother that one man either broke his neck or was otherwise seriously injured going over the obstacle course—jumping over hurdles and ditches, and climbing on and moving along horizontal ladders, with rocks and things below us. Sometimes the heavier soldiers just couldn't hold on. They would fall down and be seriously injured. Still, there was never any sympathy toward them. We had to do what we were asked to do, and if we couldn't do it, we would be injured. If injuries were serious, we were sent to the hospital, and I suppose some men did get out of the army.

Our sergeant was from Columbus, Georgia. I loved the South (I have a farm in Kentucky), and as soon as I became a little acquainted with him, I asked him to tell me about the South. I had seen *Gone with the Wind*, which had come out in 1939, and the Old South fascinated me. "How do you get along with the Negroes?" I asked him. He said, "I'll tell you one thing: if a nigger woman sat next to my wife on the bus, I'd slap her in the face" I had to live with that man for the next three years, and I couldn't tolerate that kind of a person. Negroes had to sit in the back of buses; and not having been reared among the black folks, I sometimes used go right to the back of the bus. Everyone would look at me real funny—I didn't know we weren't supposed to sit in the back. Finally I got wise and sat in the middle of buses.

In my first lecture at Camp Swift, a colonel in World War I leggings gave us a lecture, after we'd been in his regiment only a week or so. The first thing that impressed (and depressed) me was when he said, "I want you men to drive everything out of your minds but one thing: that is to kill!" We were not to have any other interest than to be a strong, able rifleman who hated and would kill the enemy. We were shown films of the enemies doing all kinds of horrible things to Americans. We were shown so much of that stuff that we really came to hate the Germans and the Japanese—really hate them, and want to kill them.

I had had no religious training up till then, only to pray. My mother taught my brother and me to pray.

We were thirty miles from Austin, and a closer town, Bastrop. Every Friday night we had opportunity to take leave and go to town. I can still remember going a couple of times with some friends. On Saturday evenings, many of those soldiers would be vomiting—on the bus, even, if they could open the windows—from all the drinking they had done. We were sent one weekend to Fort Sam Houston, Texas, to be the honor guard to the Secretary of War of Brazil. On the Saturday night, I went with some of the soldiers to the beer joints, where I would drink a beer. Three men I was with, from New York or New Jersey, were pretty wild people. They wanted to go find a lady that they could rape. About that time, I figured I'd better try to get back to the camp alone. I just left them. But that's the kind of men I was with. Another thing: when we showered, we had to make sure we put our wallets in our locked footlocker, or have some personal friend we trusted watch them. Anything we left out would be stolen, and the officers over the company would do nothing about it. I guess they figured that most of us would be killed eventually anyway. There was just not a lot of concern about things like that in those days.

I was at Camp Swift from February until about October. I was trained to be a radio operator, but then I was sent to Fort Benning, Georgia, where paratroopers were trained. At Camp Swift, we went to movies every Sunday afternoon, the only thing I enjoyed about being in basic training. I came home one afternoon from a movie, and just before dark, a highly admired lieutenant was in front of the barracks, checking when Earl Lelegren came back. I said to him, "I'm Earl Lelegren."

"Well, you received the highest grade on an aptitude test to be a radio operator in Company F. Would you like to come to headquarters company and be a radio operator?"

I replied, "I sure would!" So I went to radio school. But in October, somebody was needed at Fort Benning to go to the motor transport school for three months.

The main thing to learn in radio school was Morse Code. I remember only that at the end of a sentence, you'd punch "ditty-dum-dum-ditty" (two dashes and two dots, or something), which meant "end of sentence." It was kind of boring to sit and learn Morse Code. I liked being a radio operator, which I later was for a while, operating Walkie-Talkies, and another radio that was on the back of jeeps. I would sit and receive messages and pass them on to the officer. We went to classrooms in a building, where we learned the dashes and dots of Morse Code.

Fort Benning was also an officer training school, where "90-day wonders" went, to become an officer in ninety days. But the training was with the parachute school. I admired the paratroopers, who always had nice, shined boots, and they were tough. When they went over to Opelika, Alabama, all the locals left the beer joints, because they didn't want to get beat up by the paratroopers. But they had a tough job, jumping out of airplanes. I admired them for what they could do.

I went to a motor transport school, learning about convoys and maintenance of the trucks. I had also had the highest aptitude for that type of training, and I really liked that training. I remember I learned how to post guards in towns when the convoys were going through, how to control traffic, how to see to it that the drivers maintained their vehicles properly. We had a lot of GMC six-by-six trucks, along with jeeps and vehicles that carried machine guns. Our teachers were very intelligent, and we had students from just about every infantry division, even the First Cavalry Division, the 101st Airborne, the 82nd Airborne—all divisions had to have someone specialized in transportation. I was at Benning three months, living in fine old dormitory buildings from the old army in World War I.

Some of my respectable friends would go to the beer joints in to Opelika, just over the line, but the people of the town were unhappy with us, because some of the soldiers didn't behave as they should have—some were drunks, and so forth. They would beat up people, and I'm sure there were some rapes in those days, more than we heard about.

In February, 1944, the 97th Division was taking training in the swamp country of Louisiana. We were there for three months, learning about amphibious landings and whatever else was required to invade beaches. At that time, it was thought we'd be going to the Pacific. When we finished training, we were all sent to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, near Springfield. We weren't there very long. We were sent to Camp San Luis Obispo, California, for amphibious training. For example, we had vehicles that were combination trucks and boats. You could run them out in the ocean, where they would float and be driven by propellers, and then you could drive them up on the beach as trucks. I believe they were GMC's. We also had the LCI's (Landing Craft Infantry). We would be lowered into them from ships, then jump off onto the beach through a door that would drop down. That was dangerous, because sometimes when the door was let down, a soldier might slip and his legs get back under the door and get crushed. I didn't see any of that, but I knew it was dangerous.

I was fairly healthy through all of this, but I didn't like militarism. For one thing, the language was very bad, though I got used to it. I swore with the rest of them, I'm sure. Most of the men in our division were from New Jersey, New York, and eastern Pennsylvania; and most of them weren't principled. I agreed with some of the more intelligent men who concluded that we were there because most of our guys didn't amount to much anyway, so you might as well put them in the infantry, and "we won't miss much if they get killed." I think that was the attitude.

After being in California, in early 1945 we were sent to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, where we got on a Liberty Ship, the USS Pope, I think, and left for somewhere—we didn't know where we would be going. We were on the ship for several weeks. What concerned me is that we were down in the hold of the ships in our bunks, and after we'd been at sea for a while, I heard explosions going on out in the sea. I had a little pocket Bible a chaplain had given me in California. I kept it in my upper pocket. One night when I got worried, I read in it something to the effect that if we desired something special, had faith that we would receive, and prayed about it, it would come to pass. I didn't want to get killed, and I prayed that I wouldn't.

I didn't get seasick at all, though a lot of men vomited from seasickness. I remember that we didn't have very good food on the Liberty Ships. Then we arrived in Le Havre, France, I believe on a Sunday afternoon. There were little kids out in boats, begging for food or chewing gum or money. It must not have been very cold, because there were a lot of children in the bay. It was fun looking down at them and throwing them candy. I also remember all the church steeples in the town, although much of the town had been destroyed.

We were taken to Camp Lucky Strike. We used GI soap to wash our mess kits, and boy, it was strong. We all had diarrhea, and I can remember men getting up in the middle of the night and rushing to the bathrooms, tripping over the ropes holding up the tents we were living in. Then they'd come back and clean themselves up, but it was a mess. I knew right then that I wasn't going to like life in Europe.

We were in France only a few days, and I remember the taverns and restaurants, but the only thing you could buy was hard apple cider. It tasted good, but I was always worried about sanitation—how clean it was.

We were at Lucky Strike for about five days, and then I was assigned a jeep to drive the company commander, Captain Kanady. He knew I'd had training in Georgia, so he asked me to be his driver. But I didn't drive him until after we were in Germany. We were in a convoy, and another driver was taking turns with me. We went straight through France, Holland, Belgium, and Luxemburg. I was in the passenger seat when we came to Aachen, Germany, sleeping, slouched over. The driver shook me and said, "Look at this." I remember seeing cutting torches in the middle of the road, cutting up debris, probably so we could get through. I remember flashes on the wall in German, reminding me of German movies that I'd seen. I thought to myself, "Well, we're gettin' into it now!" We soon could hear explosions and see airplanes going over back and forth.

The next day we were in the battle of the Rhineland, at Cologne, Germany. I can still remember looking up at the two towers of the Cologne cathedral. This was all after the Battle of the Bulge, which had taken place in late December and early January, so it was probably in late January. One thing impressed me: I was in a courtyard one morning, in Remagen, on the banks of the Rhine River, where the Allies first crossed into Germany. A captain from the 101st Airborne was wearing shiny boots, though I knew he had been in and out of an airplane. "Where would he have got the polish to shine those boots so shiny?" He was a good looking, rugged guy, I thought to myself, "There's a guy who's really been through it." I had a brief conversation with him.

We had the First Infantry Division on our left, and the Second Infantry Division on our right. We were the 97th Infantry Division, the 387th Infantry Regiment, and I was in the headquarters company of the Second Battalion. The next thing I remember was that the captain told me one morning to get the jeep and trailer. The Germans were on the other side of the Rhine, but it was foggy. He said that some of our own soldiers had buried a German soldier, and we couldn't leave the body there. We went up on the banks of the river, and somebody showed the captain where the body was buried. It was only about

three feet down, and he told me to get the shovel. I dug down through the freshly dug dirt, and the first thing I came to was a black leather boot, kind of like a German field boot. I dug a little further toward where the head was, then grabbed hold of the boot and pulled the body out. As I was pulling, I realized that half his head was shot off, and tissues holding his teeth were dragging in the mud and dirt. It made me kind of sick, but fortunately he didn't weigh a lot. I threw him in the jeep trailer.

When I got back to the courtyard, I remember taking the body out of the trailer, but there remained in the trailer lots of blood, teeth and different things. I emptying a five-gallon can of gasoline in the trailer, swishing it around, and having another soldier help me trip the trailer up so I could empty it all out on the ground. We sometimes carried ammunition and food in the trailers, and we didn't have soap. I figured the best thing to use was a five-gallon of gas to clean the trailer. The body was probably put in a body bag.

But then for lunch, we had stewed chicken. When I looked at the stringy meat and bones, it reminded me of the soldier's head being dragged away, and I couldn't eat the chicken.

My job was to drive the company commander and the scouts. Probably a few days later, the battle of the Rhineland ended, and it seems to me it was a Sunday afternoon. I stood for four or five hours on the side of the road, the whole afternoon, watching surrendering German soldiers pass by. They looked terrible, half-starved, their uniforms worn out and dirty, and they hadn't bathed for a long time (of course we hadn't had baths ourselves for weeks). The road was probably thirty feet wide, and for hours, a steady stream of German soldiers passed by to a compound. I think school playgrounds or something was used to keep them. It then became just a matter of feeding and watching them. Among those German soldiers were some tough-looking German girls, doing what, I don't know. I'm sure most of the soldiers were happy to have the war over with, and they probably figured we'd be feeding them. This would have been in late March.

We immediately went over to the battle of Central Europe, toward Czechoslovakia. I still have all the original maps furnished us, maps I had in my jeep. The war in Europe ended on May 8, 1945. I was on the front lines then, and I remember the day that happened. I was going somewhere in my jeep, and we always kept the windshield down. Sometimes we worried about piano wire that might be stretched across the road, which would take our heads off. A lot of the jeeps had a piece of angle iron coming up just above our heads, which would break such wire.

On that trip, we were in a mountainous area, and it was night. We had blackout light, so you couldn't see much in front of you, only the lights of the back of the jeep in front of you. You didn't want to get very far behind, because you might get off on a side road and get lost. We came around a bend, and I could just barely see a man, a German soldier, on my right front. I don't remember if he tried to stop me, but I hit him and he flew off the bank and down into the ditch. We just kept on going. We couldn't stop, and it probably wouldn't have been safe anyway.

About that same time, we were at Lieverkausen (near Dusseldorf), looking for some explosives outside of town. A Gestapo officer was going to help us find them. He had a German Luger pistol, and we all wanted one. After I became a little acquainted with him, I asked him, "Haben-sie pistola?" (Have you a pistol?) He told me he had a Luger, but I'd have to go with him into the city hall, down in the basement. I followed him. The ceilings had all been torn off, and there was a lot of water in the building. We came to some stairs (he could speak some English), where he let me know there was no use of my walking into the basement. He said, "Wait here." He went down in the water, came back, and handed me a Luger pistol, loaded. It had been soaking in water. (I still have it, though it's a little bit rusty.) But it had extra

ammunition in the holster. We were alone as he came out of the basement and handed me the pistol; he could have shot me and thrown me down in the basement. I probably had some K-rations in my pocket, and he was very hungry, as all the Germans were.

One night in the battle of Central Europe, I got lost and didn't know where the captain or anybody else was. I was in a little village, and it was quiet. I went upstairs in a house, looking for a bed (we always looked for dry beds). I found one and laid down. It was a fairly large home. I don't remember checking to see if anyone else was in the home or not. I remember lying down, but before I went to sleep, I thought, "I'd better look under the bed, to see what's under there." I looked under the bed, and there I found stuffed a complete German uniform—helmet, buckle, boots, the whole works. I worried all night long that its owner might still be in the building. But nothing happened.

In the battle of Central Europe, a week or so later, in late April, I was driving three scouts, who were supposed to determine where the Germans were in a heavily wooded area. We didn't have many airplanes over us at the time. We got ahead of the front lines and into a quaint, pretty little village of about a hundred homes, or so. We didn't see any Germans, so we figured the German civilians had moved ahead. We just parked in the middle of the town square, where there was a well that the citizens used. We were eating some of our rations. Pretty soon, about a dozen German soldiers in a home just a hundred feet from us came out, their arms up, to surrender to us. It must have been fairly cold, because they were wearing overcoats. We had them line up, but wondered what we were going to do with them. We didn't know where our people were, or how long before they would be with us. We hadn't seen allied soldiers or equipment for a couple of hours. We just told them to line up, while we were trying to decide what to do, the four of us there alone.

One of the soldiers dropped from under his coat to the ground what we called a 42 machine gun. I told the other guys, "Look at that." They walked over and grabbed it, but he had been prepared to use it in case we didn't treat him in a civilized way. They also knew we had food, because we'd been eating it when they came out of the house.

Shortly after that, I saw another German soldier coming out of a house down the street. We all wanted pistols, and the cooks all wanted guns as souvenirs, especially the Lugers. This soldier had his arms up, so I walked over to him and asked, "Haben sie pistola?" He said, "Ja," then had me follow him around the back of the same house he came from. There we found a lady in a rocking chair—it was a sunny day. He said something to her in German, then he went into the woodshed near the house. I could hear him moving some stuff in the shed. Then he came out and handed me a World War I German Mauser pistol, loaded. I still have the article from the Berliner that was stuffed into the holster to hold extra rounds of ammunition. He handed the pistol to me, but he could just as well have shot me. The war was still going on, but they wanted to get it over with, probably because they were fearful of being captured by the Russians, who were harder on the Germans than the Allies were. And they could probably tell that we were good natured.

By the way, I was interested in talking to the German women, though we hardly ever saw them, because they were hidden. When we did see them, they never had any makeup on. They made themselves look as homely as possible. I never liked getting close to them—I hadn't had a bath for several weeks. I worried about the women smelling me. One nice-looking German lady who could speak English complained that we had stolen her silverware from her house. And the Americans probably had—we took everything.

Once when we were headed toward Czechoslovakia, going through pretty, rolling hills, we had an American interpreter with us, though we never knew whether we could trust him. We pulled into a little

village, where we stayed a couple of hours. A very nice German lady (I don't know where she got the food, because food was scarce) had fixed up a fifteen-inch diameter platter of little pieces of sausage, cheese, and so forth. She put it out on a table and said, "You enjoy this"—letting us know it was for our enjoyment. Our captain shook his head, as if to say, "We're not supposed to eat or take stuff from the Germans." We weren't even supposed to associate with them, only be firm with them. But I felt bad for her, offering us this food, when the Germans were starving. I'm sure she wondered why we didn't touch it. She probably thought that we suspected she was trying to poison us.

We pulled into a little town near Pilsen, Czechoslovakia, on a Sunday night. We had traveled all day and were cold and wet. I hadn't slept in a bed for a month or two. My clothes had been wet all that day. We went into a house, and our sergeant, a Christian Science man (I had been with him for a couple of years) by the name of Smith, said, "Lelegren, go downstairs.

We're going to be shelled." I had just started to walk upstairs. The few German civilians there had said we were going to be shelled heavily that night by the famous 88 artillery, which was in the woods in the next community, probably only half a mile or a mile from us. I said to him, "I'm not worried about that. There's a bed upstairs, and I'm going to sleep in it."

Sure enough, in the middle of the night, along came the artillery barrage, almost in a steady roar. I could see through the windows in my bedroom that the house next to me was burning. As fast as I could, I promised the Lord that if my life would be spared, someday I'd do something to compensate him. Nothing happened to me that night, though a few hours later, I heard that Billy Kazakawitz and another soldier had been killed. (I have their names in the casualty list of a book that contains the history of our regiment.) [Shows the names in the book under the heading: "This book is dedicated to the officers and men who lost their lives, while performing their duties in combat with this regiment." The book must have been printed in Japan, after the war ended. It tells about our being in the army of occupation of Japan.] Kazakawitz was a very wild guy. That same night, when we were shelled heavily, I heard some other scouts downstairs (of the I&R—Intelligence and Reconnaissance) say, "Billy Kazakawitz was killed." It was still dark, and I thought to myself, "The captain is going to have me get Billy in the morning." Sure enough, when it became daylight, the captain had me get the trailer and a stretcher, and we headed forward about a quarter of a mile to the edge of a thick woods. There was a lane going into it. Another soldier in our company, also a scout, Walter Cadenbach (a fine young man, good looking and healthy), was standing along the side of the woods. The captain said to me, "Stay with the jeep this time. I'll take Cadenbach with me." Cadenbach was big and strong and could carry Kazakawitz out. They went into the woods, and about five minutes later, I heard a German machine gun (the German machine guns shot more rapidly than ours and were superior—we called them "42's"). I thought, "Oh, oh." But I didn't hear anything else. Pretty soon one of our tanks drove up, with a soldier sticking his head out the top. He asked, "Where are they?"

I answered, "Probably just down that lane."

He went down the lane, and I could hear him firing at a building, and it sounded like the building was soon on fire. Maybe the tank's shells were incendiary. Then a sergeant came back and said, "You've got to get both Kazakawitz and Cadenbach." Cadenbach had been killed as he entered the woods. Later when I went in, I first came to Cadenbach. His helmet was on the ground, next to his head; and he had a bullet hole right in the center of his forehead. I remember that one of his arms was sticking up, for some reason. I remember thinking, "His mother is going to get a telegram, and my mother won't."

We put Cadenbach in the trailer, then drove a little farther, down a narrow road, probably only fifteen feet wide, with banks on either side. Kazak had been shot with a machine gun, and of his innards were

laying outside of his body. His face was still covered with the backening the men used to prevent their faces from shining when they went scouting at night. He must have been hit with several rounds. We loaded him in the trailer.

I was in combat the whole time I was in Germany, but I never killed anybody. I was in danger of shrapnel, though I was never shot at, that I know of. For example, on the Sieg River, I remember trying to climb up the river bank in my jeep, after passing through the river, but I kept sliding back. The German shrapnel from the 88's was landing all around us. Finally, I got up out of the canal, and we came to a castle. I went in and took off the wall a shotgun made by the most famous gunsmith in the world, Adolph Losche. I still have it. In Bamberg, Germany, we were allowed to make little wooden boxes to send our souvenirs home. Of course we couldn't put ammunition in the boxes, but we were allowed to mail all these things home. We could also carry, as I recall, one or two revolvers or other automatic handguns home with us. We were inspected when we came home, but I was able to carry my Luger and Mauser pistols home with me. (From Japan, I later mailed home a couple of Japanese rifles and Samurai Swords, as well as hari-kari knives. I still have all those.)

My brother was in the Eighth Armored Division, and I suppose I asked where he was. But you didn't have time to look somebody up.

We were in Europe only about five months. There had been a lot of transfers out of our unit. We came back on a ship called the USS General Sturgis, one of the Liberty ships. We went into New York harbor, on a nice, warm evening, a little before dark, and when I saw the Statue of Liberty, I thought how lucky I was to have lived through it all, and then be back home in the United States. I think when I got off the ship, I kissed the ground.

I was furloughed and took a troop train home to Burbank, California, and I had a thirty-day leave. I got on a bus in Los Angeles to go to Burbank, and then I had to hitchhike home. A man picked me up on the street where I was walking and asked me where I'd been. I let him know that I was just getting home from Europe. He thought I was just coming from an army camp. When I told him I had been in Europe, he said, "Well, you want to get home in a hurry." He broke all speed limits while driving me to where I lived, so that I could get home. My mother was very happy to see me, and she called my dad on the phone, who was working at Lockheed. He was there in about fifteen minutes. I remember standing next to our dining room table, and my dad was so happy to see me, he shook my hand. As we were talking, he looked down at my right arm, and then my left arm, to see if I still had my arms. I could tell that he was wondering if I still had my arms, because my parents hadn't heard from me for two or three months. My brother had written to me, as well as my uncles and aunts, and my grandmother in Chicago. They all worried, because they knew I was in the infantry, the worst service to be in. I don't remember getting much mail while I was in Europe, though I wrote to my folks once a week. I don't know how long it took them to get the mail. I had one girlfriend, a Catholic girl, but she didn't want me. She told me that a priest would have to perform the marriage, though I told her that didn't matter.

I remember once attending a Catholic service, where the other soldiers all around were all kneeling down, but I didn't know what I was supposed to be doing. I remember they were not friendly with me—none of them shook my hand or said, "Nice to have you here," or anything. I went to a Protestant service in Japan; the chaplain was from Texas. He warned us not to visit the houses of ill repute: "Gentlemen, if you go to those places and get interested in that type of entertainment, you're taking away your future good life from up here (pointing up) and using it down here (pointing down with his fingers)." I think most of the soldiers were spending time in those places. But he let us know that if we did that, we were detracting from our later lives, having excitement here but paying for it later.

I was still in the United States when the atomic bombs were dropped. It was still a month before we left for Japan, in early September, as I recall. Many agreements had to be signed before we could occupy Japan. One thing I liked about President Truman—he wanted to get the war over.

Then we had to go to Fort Bragg, North Carolina; and from there back to Washington, and to the Pacific. We went to Cebu Island, then to Leyte (in the Philippines). When we landed in Cebu, I looked up, and there was a sign on a bank that said, “Bank of the Philippines,” but you could hardly read the writing, it was so gouged so badly. From there we went to Yokohama, where I drove the lieutenant to every police station, with an interpreter, saying that we wanted everything that had to do with war brought to the station: daggers, spears, guns, etc. We later saw ancient spears and hari-kari knives that had been in the shrines. All that stuff had been turned in, though the families hated to give some of those things up, because the items were three or four hundred years old, assigned to each family. We had truckloads of such stuff, which we either threw in the river or broke or burned it up. But anything the soldiers wanted, they could of course have. We all got a lot of souvenirs, and I still have some.

I was among the first to drive a jeep inland, where we went to the town of Oata, where the Mitsubishi aircraft plant was located. We stayed at the Mitsubishi plant, where we fixed up some little side rooms to sleep in. We went into the hangers, where the little kamikaze planes were stored. We’d sit where the pilot would sit, then pull a lever. The wheels would drop loose and the plane would drop to the floor. You could hear those plane dropping all over the hanger, from the soldiers going in. I got a rear gun sight from one of those. The pilots knew that if they flew one of those, they’d never live, because their mission was to fly them into the sides of ships.

The Japanese people were as polite and cooperative as could be, friendly and nice. We hired them to work for us. The older men we hired were pleasant and humble. They asked us our names, but we gave a dirty name to each one of us. We’d tell them that so-and-so’s name was _____ (I won’t repeat the names). We did this as kind of a joke, of course. In general, Japan was a pleasant place. We had pretty good food shipped to us. I remember the salami, which we would fry. We had no problems once we got to Japan; everything went smoothly.

What disappointed me, the second day we were there, a bunch of officers in our company, maybe six or eight, loaded into my jeep and wanted to go to the red-light district. It was a disgrace. Of course they invited me to go with them to the “geisha district.” I told them, “No, I’ll wait here with the jeep and come back later with my friend to get you.” Sometimes, I never went back. Sometimes I wanted to, but I never did. Those girls became very fond of the American soldiers, because they wanted money. My father had always told my brother and me that if we reached age twenty-one and hadn’t started smoking, he would give us a special present. So we knew we shouldn’t be smoking. But in Japan, I smoked cigars once in a while, because the Japanese people thought we were wealthy millionaires when we smoked cigars. So I just did it to show off once in a while. Of course we had all the cigarettes we wanted, though don’t think I smoked more than ten all the time I was in the army. I traded mine to the Japanese for flags and other different things.

Some of us had American civilian oxford shoes. We could get as much as \$45 a pair for them—a lot of money then. I remember selling my own for that price. The problem was that we couldn’t take the money back to the States with us. I had to buy stamps or collectable items with my money. We were paid yen (fifteen yen to the dollar), but we could trade it back into American money. I could only buy postage stamps, and I remember buying as many as I could, because I did make money by selling some of our stuff. Having a jeep, I could go into other towns, for example, a wealthy silk town, called Kiryu, where the people had a lot of money. I took with me stuff I had to sell and exchanged it for silk. There was a narrow alley, and if you drove down it and honked your horn, some wealthy Japanese would come

out of a certain building and buy everything we wanted to sell. We'd just park the jeep, though we were taking a chance. We could have got in a lot of trouble for doing that. I did buy some silk and kimonos to bring back home.

When I was in Japan, I went to the first rodeo ever held in Japan, in Niji Stadium, where baseball games were held. It was the Australian soldiers who put it on. It was spooky to come back to the base on the trains late at night; it was hard to find your way around. I remember a Japanese girl naming the towns the train was going through. I told someone that I needed to get back to Oita. We were in boxcars, which had a lantern at the end. I was the only American in the car, going from Tokyo to Oita, in the middle of the night. There were no seats; we were all standing up. I remember everyone looking at me. There was straw or something on the floor. A Japanese girl came over and stood by me, kind of wanting to flirt with me, I guess. I remember putting my arm around her, but I was worried about the other Japanese coming over and stabbing me or something, though they never did.

I was in Japan until early February 1946; I was separated on February 19. I had built up a lot of points to come home. By then, I was glad to be alive. Knowing that I would likely not get killed, I didn't mind being in the occupation in Japan, though I did want to get back home. Until the bomb was dropped, I was worried about getting killed. After the bomb, I was fairly happy.

I came home on another Liberty ship. The only time I got very seasick, I laid down on my bunk. I vomited, and the vomit went all over the bunk. I left to go into the restroom to clean up, then came back to my bunk. It was completely clean; I had been in someone else's bunk.

We docked at Long Beach, California, then went to Fort McArthur, where we were separated. I'll never forget the morning that I got out of there.

After I came home, I drifted around, and that's important. I went to Glendale College, in a nice part of Southern California. There, I met a nice girl from Kentucky, a Baptist girl, the only religious girl I ever met there. I did know one LDS family, but I didn't see much of them. I took this girl out several times, and she didn't smoke or drink, like all the other girls did—during the breaks, they smoked in my 1940 black Mercury convertible (it had a white top). This girl got me to going to church with her in San Fernando, and I enjoyed going with her. But I couldn't quite get converted to her church. For one thing, a young Baptist preacher told the congregation in one meeting, in about 1949, that if the congregation couldn't pay him more than \$500 or \$600 a month (whatever it was), he was going to go find another congregation. That didn't go over very well with me, because I think I'd heard that the Mormon clergy didn't get paid.

I had known some Mormon boys in high school. My first lesson in tithing was from a good friend in high school who paid tithing on money he earned by stealing automobile parts! At the end of the school year in 1949, the Baptist girl went back to Kentucky to her family. I received an invitation to visit their home. Her father was an assistant to a political boss, and he and I became good friends. Through the father, I met the governor and some of the political leaders in Kentucky. Her mother took me to a Baptist church meeting in Owensboro one Sunday night, in October or November of 1949, and she had already told me about R. G. Letourneau, who had become wealthy manufacturing tanks and other heavy equipment for the army, because he paid tithing. The mother was trying to get me interested in the Baptist church. A famous Baptist preacher from the Baptist Theological Seminary in New Orleans gave a very moving talk on tithing. He very much impressed me, and then he passed pledges around. I didn't like the idea of pledges. I decided right then, in 1949, that I would pay tithing, because I had promised the Lord, during the war, that I would do something. I figured that this was the one thing I could do—start paying tithing.

I went back to California, and my friend from high school (who had paid tithing on stolen auto parts) came to my home and said, “Earl, come with me to Brigham Young University.”

I said to him, “No, I’m going to Glendale College, where there are a lot of good-lookin’ girls.”

He said, “Earl, the best-looking’ girls in the world are at BYU.” Then he added, “Let me use your telephone.”

He called the registrar, Loren Jackson, at BYU and told him about me. He registrar said, “Bring him up. We’ll get him in some way. We’ll get him in.”

My friend explained, “He doesn’t smoke or drink or anything. I’d like to bring him up.”

So I came to BYU, and the first day I was there, he took me in to meet Hugh B. Brown, who was a friend of the family and was over the department of religion. My friend said to him, “My friend Earl is not a member of the Church. What should I do with him?”

Brother Brown said, “Put him in Norman Dunn’s class.” Brother Dunn was a fine old man from England who taught English and religion. Norman Dunn used a book by Lowell Bennion called *The Religion of the Latter-day Saints*. I was quite impressed by everything I saw at BYU. I read Moroni 10:5 in Bennion’s book. I then wanted to go back to Kentucky, to convert that girl to the Mormon Church. At the time, I was living in a gloomy basement room on Center Street, near the mental hospital. The second morning after I prayed about the Book of Mormon, right before daylight, I found myself looking upward, and a personage in a white robe was above me, looking at me. He said, “These things you are learning of Mormonism are the truth, and you are to tell them to others.” The voice was clear as mine is right now, and I was fully awake when the personage came to me.

I was immediately awake, and it was beginning to become daylight. He could have said nothing more understandable and clear.

I never told anyone about this visit, not even my friend who had brought me to BYU, until about a year and a half later. I now knew the Church was true, but I didn’t think I would ever join it. The next year, I was attending a Catholic college in Kentucky in the spring of 1951. I had been paying tithing in the LDS branch in Provo, but I still wanted to live in Kentucky. But I could see that the Catholics just didn’t have what the LDS Church had. I loved the nuns—I became very close to one of them. But I could tell there was something wrong in the class that was taught by a priest. That spring, I wrote my friend, Wallace Anderson, in California and told him I was going to come home in the summer and have him baptize me into his church. In the meantime, I was paying tithing to the mission office in Louisville, Kentucky, and they were wondering who the nonmember was in Owensboro who was sending tithing to the Church. Some of the people nearby got hold of me in some way, and I started to go to church with them. In 1951, I had my friend baptize me, and I went back to BYU.

When I first went to BYU, I knew a little about the Croft family. Faye Croft was only thirteen years old in January of 1950, the eldest of five daughters. I never would have imagined that that girl would blossom into a charming co-ed and that I would later marry her in the Salt Lake Temple.

When I graduated from BYU, I was still wanting to live in Kentucky. On the bulletin board in the Maeser Building, there was an advertisement for a law school in Lebanon, Tennessee. After I graduated from BYU in 1955, I went back to visit the school. The lady at the dormitory told me to come back the next

morning and meet the dean and Judge Gilreath. I met the judge and the dean, who looked over my record at BYU, and they said, "We'd be glad to have you."

I asked Judge Gilreath, "I'm a Mormon. What do you know about the Mormons?"

He immediately sounded off: "Mr. Lelegren, Reed Smoot was a Mormon!" And he said that with a smile on his face. I could tell he liked Reed Smoot. Gilreath was a very prominent judge, known all over the Southeast. "But Mr. Lelegren, I don't understand about the people getting a dark skin in so short period of time"—talking about curse of a dark skin on the Indians. I didn't know how to explain it, because I'd been a member of the Church for only about five years.

Of interest, I went to the law school for a year, but came back to Utah, because there were no LDS girls in Kentucky. When I met Faye's mother, Grace Croft, on campus, I said to her, "Sister Croft, I'm a lot older than your daughter." She was a very well educated lady (and is still alive at age ninety-five in 2005). "How do you and your husband feel about my taking your daughter? I'm a lot older."

She didn't say, "We'll think about it," or anything. She was smart enough to know that whatever she said might backfire. She just gave me a very pleasant smile, and in her autobiography, she wrote, "Earl continued to date Faye." Soon after, I was engaged to Faye and married her.

About eight years ago when I was in Kentucky for an Arabian horse show, I went to Tennessee to get some information on Judge Gilreath, because I thought I might do his temple work. No one in town seemed to know anything about where he originally had come from, or the dates I needed. I went into a flower shop to get some flowers for a little lady whose son I had baptized years ago, a very staunch LDS lady in a rest home. I asked the lady in the flower shop, "Have you ever heard of Judge Gilreath?"

She said, "Yes, he was married to my aunt. My mother was his wife's sister."

"Oh, I would like to learn something about him."

"His daughter, who practices law in Lebanon, is dying of cancer. But she'd love to have you visit her."

It was arranged that I should go out to visit her, in the old family colonial home on the outskirts of town. She welcomed me and said, "Right there is where my dad died. He was going in to watch Gunsmoke."

This would have been in the 1960s, though it was just eight years ago (1997) when I went to visit. I said to her, "Catherine, I'm a Mormon, and I'd like to do some things in our temple for your dad. I also understand that you're not well. We have a prayer roll in our temples. Would you mind if I put your name on a prayer roll and get some information on your dad?"

"I'd be happy to do that. My dad was reading the Book of Mormon when he died."

She gave me information on her dad, but not enough on her mother to have them sealed. Later, I did get that information.

So I had joined the Church and had kept paying tithing. I was assistant insurance commissioner for seven years, and then I handled liability claims for the Church for sixteen years, part-time as an independent contractor.

I teach tithing about two or three times a week when I can find people who will listen. People come to me often because of the land I've acquired, and real estate is now booming in this area. When they ask me how I acquired the land, I always tell the story about tithing. I have never worked anywhere to get a pension; I've had no income. But I've become quite well off because of the land. I attribute it all to the paying of tithing. I bear my testimony that if we pay our tithing and live the other principles of the gospel, we'll have everything we want—good health, strength, and a nice family. One of my sons married one of the prettiest girls who ever attended BYU, and now he's a CPA in Salt Lake City, doing a good job of rearing his kids. One of my daughters married Karl Buehner's grandson. I have another daughter who married a Chinese fellow. There were some problems, and he was deported. I'm rearing the two children. The daughter is an outstanding student, always on the honor roll; and she's become a well-known ballet dancer. (She's been in the Nutcracker at BYU the last six years.) The young boy goes with me to Kentucky and is learning to become a missionary. My daughter lives in my home and works at Thanksgiving Point. Another son is a search and rescue worker.

The military enabled me to have six years of college. If I hadn't had those years, I would never have found the gospel. The State of California gave me one year of graduate work after the GI Bill ran out. I probably should have finished law school. But that one year helped me greatly in tort law and contracts. I especially enjoyed handling liability claims for the Church—claims for missionaries in accidents all over the world, some involving over a million dollars.

I first lived in Big Cottonwood Canyon. I came into Utah Valley in about 1974 and started buying pieces of ground. I eventually had about thirty-five acres. Now I've got about half that. The home I now live in, I built for my brother, whose wife had died in California. We brought him here and built this home for him. He had cancer and died in 1998. My wife and I moved into this home (I already owned the property) and I let my daughter and her children live in our other home.

I'm a lucky man.

I bear testimony that this gospel is true, and if we'll live its principles, especially the principle of tithing, we'll have everything we need. There's no material thing I want that I don't have. I testify this in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.